The MAN on the BEACH

by

Bret Harte

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BY

BRET HARTE

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THE MAN ON THE BEACH.

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THE

MAN ON THE BEACH.

CHAPTER I.

HE lived beside a river that emptied into a great ocean. The narrow strip of land that lay between him and the estuary was covered at high tide by a shining film of water, at low tide with the cast-up offerings of sea and shore. Logs yet green and saplings washed away from inland banks, battered fragments of wrecks and orange crates of bamboo, broken into tiny rafts yet odorous with their lost freight, lay in long successive curves—the fringes and overlappings of the sea. At high noon the shadow of a seagull's wing, or a sudden flurry and gray squall of sand pipers—themselves but

shadows—was all that broke the monotonous glare of the level sands.

He had lived there alone for a twelvemonth. Although but a few miles from a thriving settlement. During that time his retirement had never been intruded upon, his seclusion remained unbroken. In any other community he might have been the subject of rumour or criticism, but the miners at Camp Rogue and the traders at Trinidad Head—themselves individual and eccentric—were profoundly indifferent to all other forms of eccentricity or heterodoxy that did not come in contact with their own. And certainly there was no form of eccentricity less aggressive than that of a "hermit," had they chosen to give him that title. But they did not even do that—probably from lack of interest or perception. To the various traders who supplied his small wants he was known as "Kernel," "Judge," and "Boss." To the general public "The Man on the Beach" was considered a sufficiently distinguishing title. His name, his occupation, rank or antecedents, nobody cared to inquire. Whether this arose from a fear of reciprocal inquiry and interest,

or from the profound indifference before alluded to, I cannot say.

He did not look like a hermit. A man yet young, erect, well-dressed, clean-shaven, with a low voice, and a smile half melancholy, half cynical, was scarcely the conventional idea of a solitary. His dwelling, a rude improvement on a fisherman's cabin, had all the severe exterior simplicity of frontier architecture, but within was comfortable and wholesome. Three rooms —a kitchen, living room, and a bedroom—were all it contained.

He had lived there long enough to see the dull monotony of one season lapse into the dull monotony of the other. The bleak northwest trade winds had brought him mornings of staring sunlight and nights of fog and silence. The warmer southwest trades had brought him clouds, rain, and the transient glories of quick grasses and odorous beech blossoms. But, summer or winter, wet or dry season, on one side rose always the sharply defined hills, with their changeless background of evergreens ; on the other side stretched always the illimitable ocean as sharply defined against the horizon,

and as unchanging in its hue. The onset of spring and autumn tides, some changes among his feathered neighbors, the footprints of certain wild animals along the river's bank, and the hanging out of parti-colored signals from the wooded hillside far inland helped him to record the slow months. On summer afternoons, when the sun sank behind a bank of fog that, moving solemnly shoreward, at last encompassed him and blotted out sea and sky, his isolation was complete. The damp gray sea that flowed above and around and about him always seemed to shut out an intangible world beyond, and to be the only real presence. The booming of breakers only a few rods from his dwelling was but a vague and unintelligible sound, or the echo of something past forever. Every morning when the sun tore away the misty curtain he awoke, dazed and bewildered, as upon a new world. The first sense of oppression over, he came to love at last this subtle spirit of oblivion; and at night, when its cloudy wings were folded over his cabin, he would sit alone with a sense of security he had never felt before. On such occasions he was apt to leave

his door open, and listen as for footsteps, for what might not come to him out of this vague, nebulous world outside. Perhaps even *she*—for this strange solitary was not insane nor visionary. He was only materially alone. For night and day, sleeping or waking, pacing the beach or crouching over his driftwood fire, a woman's face was always before him—the face for whose sake and for cause of whom he sat there alone. He saw it in the morning sunlight; it was her white hands that were lifted from the crested breakers; it was the rustling of her skirt when the sea wind swept through the long beach grasses; it was the loving whisper of her low voice when the long waves sank and died among the sedge and rushes. She was as omnipresent as sea and sky and level sand. Hence, when the fog wiped them away, she seemed to draw closer to him in the darkness. On one or two more gracious nights in midsummer, when the influence of the fervid noonday sun was still felt on the heated sands, the warm breath of the fog touched his cheek as if it had been hers, and the salt tears started to his eyes.

Before the fogs came—for he arrived there

in winter—he had found surcease and rest in the steady light of a lighthouse upon the little promontory, a league below his habitation. Even on the darkest nights and in the tumults of storm it spoke to him of a patience that was enduring and a steadfastness that was unshakable. Later on he found a certain dumb companionship in an uprooted tree, which, floating down the river, had stranded hopelessly upon his beach, but in the evening had again drifted away. Roving across the estuary a day or two afterwards, he recognized the tree again from a "blaze" of the settler's axe still upon its trunk. He was not surprised a week later to find the same tree in the sands before his dwelling, or that the next morning it should be again launched on its purposeless wanderings. And so, impelled by wind or tide, but always haunting his seclusion, he would meet it voyaging up the river at the flood, or see it tossing among the breakers on the bar, but always with the confidence of its returning sooner or later to an anchorage beside him. After the third month of his self-imposed exile, he was forced into a more human companionship that was

brief but regular. He was obliged to have menial assistance. While he might have eaten his bread "in sorrow" carelessly and mechanically, if it had been prepared for him, the occupation of cooking his own food brought the vulgarity and materialness of existence so near to his morbid sensitiveness that he could not eat the meal he had himself prepared. He did not yet wish to die, and when starvation or society seemed to be the only alternative, he chose the latter. An Indian woman, so hideous as to scarcely suggest humanity, at stated times performed for him those offices. When she did not come, which was not infrequent, he did not eat.

Such was the mental and physical condition of "The Man on the Beach" on the 1st of January, 1869.

It was a still bright day, following a week of rain and wind. Low down the horizon still lingered a few white flecks—the flying squadrons of the storm—as vague as distant sails. Southward the harbor bar whitened occasionally but lazily; even the turbulent Pacific swell stretched its length wearily upon the shore.

And toiling over the low sand dunes, from the settlement a carriage at last halted half a mile from the solitary's dwelling.

"I reckon ye'll hev to git out here," said the driver pulling up to breathe his panting horses. "Ye can't git any nigher."

There was a groan of execration from the interior of the vehicle, a hysterical little shriek, and one or two shrill expressions of feminine disapprobation, but the driver moved not. At last a masculine head expostulated from the window: "Look here; you agreed to take us to the house. Why, it's a mile away at least!"

"Thar, or tharabouts, I reckon," said the driver, coolly crossing his legs on the box.

"It's no use talking; *I* never can walk through this sand and horrid glare," said a female voice quickly and imperatively. Then apprehensively, "Well, of all the places!"

"Well, I never!"

"This *does* exceed everything."

"It's really *too* idiotic for anything."

It was noticeable that while the voices betrayed the difference of age and sex, they bore a singular resemblance to each other, and a

certain querulousness of pitch that was dominant.

"I reckon I've gone about as fur as I allow to go with them hosses," continued the driver suggestively, "and as time's vallyble, ye'd better onload yerselves."

"The wretch does not mean to leave us here alone?" said a female voice in shrill indignation. "You'll wait for us, driver," said a masculine voice, confidently,

"How long?" asked the driver.

There was a hurried consultation within. The words "might send us packing!" "May take all night to get him to listen to reason." "Bother! whole thing over in ten minutes," came from the window. The driver meanwhile had settled himself back in his seat, and whistled in patient contempt of a fashionable "fare" that didn't know its own mind nor destination. Finally, the masculine head was thrust out, and, with a certain potential air of judicially ending a difficulty, said:

"You're to follow us slowly, and put up your horses in the stable or barn until we want you."

An ironical laugh burst from the driver. "Oh, yes—in the stable or barn—in course. But, my eyes sorter failin' me, mebbee now, some er you younger folks will kindly pint out the stable or barn of the Kernel's. Woa! —will ye!—woa! Give me a chance to pick out that there barn or stable to put ye in!" This in arch confidence to the horses, who had not moved.

Here the previous speaker, rotund, dignified, and elderly, alighted indignantly, closely followed by the rest of the party—two ladies and a gentleman. One of the ladies was past the age, but not the fashion of youth, and her Parisian dress clung over her wasted figure and well-bred bones, artistically, if not gracefully; the younger lady, evidently her daughter, was crisp and pretty, and carried off the aquiline nose and aristocratic emaciation of her mother with a certain piquancy and dash that was charming. The gentleman was young, thin, with the family characteristics, but otherwise indistinctive.

With one accord they all faced directly toward the spot indicated by the driver's whip. Nothing

but the bare, bleak, rectangular outlines of the cabin of "The Man on the Beach" met their eyes. All else was a desolate expanse, unrelieved by any structure higher than the tussocks of scant beach grass that clothed it. They were so utterly helpless that the driver's derisive laughter gave way at last to good humour and suggestion. "Look yee," he said finally, "I don't know ez it's your fault you don't know this kentry ez well ez you do Yurup; so I'll drag this yer team over to Baker's on the river, give the horses a bite, and then meander down this yer ridge, and wait for ye. Ye'll see me from the Kernel's." And without waiting for a reply, he swung his horses' heads toward the river, and rolled away.

The same querulous protest that had come from the windows arose from the group, but vainly. Then followed accusations and recrimination. "It's *your* fault; you might have written, and had him meet us at the settlement." "You wanted to take him by surprise!" "I didn't." "You knew if I'd written that we were coming, he'd have taken good care to run away from us." "Yes, to some more inaccessible

place." "There can be none worse than this," &c., &c. But it was so clearly evident that nothing was to be done but to go forward, that even in the midst of their wrangling they straggled on in Indian file toward the distant cabin, sinking ankle deep in the yielding sand, punctuating their verbal altercation with sighs, and only abating it at a scream from the elder lady.

"Where's Maria?"

"Gone on ahead!" grunted the younger gentleman, in a bass voice, so incongruously large for him that it seemed to have been a ventriloquistic contribution by somebody else.

It was too true. Maria, after adding her pungency to the general-conversation, had darted on ahead. But alas! that swift Camilla, after scouring the plain some two hundred feet with her demi-train, came to grief on an unbending tussock and sat down, panting but savage. As they plodded wearily toward her, she bit her red lips, smacked them on her cruel little white teeth like a festive and sprightly ghoul, and lisped:

"You *do* look so like guys! For all the world

like those English shopkeepers we met on the Righi, doing the three-guinea excursion in their Sunday clothes!"

Certainly the spectacle of these exotically plumed bipeds, whose fine feathers were already bedrabbled by sand and growing limp in the sea breeze, was somewhat dissonant with the rudeness of sea and sky and shore. A few gulls screamed at them; a loon startled from the lagoon arose shrieking and protesting, with painfully extended legs, in obvious burlesque of the younger gentleman. The elder lady felt the justice of her gentle daughter's criticism, and retaliated with simple directness:

"Your skirt is ruined, your hair is coming down, your hat is half off your head, and your shoes—in heaven's name, Maria! what *have* you done with your shoes?"

Maria had exhibited a slim stockinged foot from under her skirt. It was scarcely three fingers broad, with an arch as patrician as her nose. "Somewhere between here and the carriage," she answered; "Dick can run back and find it—while he is looking for your brooch, mamma. Dick's so obliging."

The robust voice of Dick thundered, but the wasted figure of Dick feebly ploughed its way back, and returned with the missing buskin.

"I may as well carry them in my hand like the market girls at Saumur, for we have got to wade soon," said Miss Maria, sinking her own terrors in the delightful contemplation of the horror in her parent's face, as she pointed to a shining film of water slowly deepening in a narrow swale in the sands between them and the cabin.

"It's the tide," said the elder gentleman. "If we intend to go on we must hasten ; permit me, my dear madam," and before she could reply he had lifted the astounded matron in his arms, and made gallantly for the ford. The gentle Maria cast an ominous eye on her brother who, with manifest reluctance, performed for her the same office. But that acute young lady kept her eyes upon the preceding figure of the elder gentleman, and seeing him suddenly and mysteriously disappear to his armpits, unhesitatingly threw herself from her brother's protecting arms—an action which instantly precipitated him into the water—and paddled hastily to the

opposite bank, where she eventually assisted in pulling the elderly gentleman out of the hollow in which he had fallen, and in rescuing her mother, who floated helplessly upheld by her skirts like a gigantic and variegated water lily on the surface. Dick followed with a single gaiter. In another minute they were safe on the opposite bank.

The elder lady gave way to tears, Maria laughed hysterically, Dick mingled a bass oath with the now audible surf; the elder gentleman, whose florid face the salt water had bleached, and whose dignity seemed to have been washed away, accounted for both by saying he thought it was a quicksand.

"It might have been," said a quiet voice behind them; "you should have followed the sand dunes half a mile further to the estuary."

They turned instantly at the voice. It was that of "The Man on the Beach." They all rose to their feet and uttered together, save one, the single exclamation, "James!" The elder gentleman said "Mr. North," and, with a slight resumption of his former dignity, buttoned his coat over his damp shirt front.

There was a silence, in which the Man on the Beach looked gravely down upon them. If they had intended to impress him by any suggestion of a gay, brilliant, and sensuous world without in their own persons, they had failed, and they knew it. Keenly alive as they had always been to external prepossession, they felt that they looked forlorn and ludicrous, and that the situation lay in his hands. The elderly lady again burst into tears of genuine distress. Maria coloured over her cheek bones, and Dick stared at the ground in sullen disquiet.

"You had better get up," said the Man on the Beach, after a moment's thought, "and come up to the cabin. I cannot offer you a change of garments, but you can dry them by the fire."

They all rose together, and again said, in chorus, "James!" but this time with an evident effort to recall some speech or action previously resolved upon and committed to memory. The elder lady got so far as to clasp her hands and add, "You have not forgotten us—James, oh, James!" the younger gentleman to attempt a brusque, "Why, Jim, old boy," that ended in querulous incoherence, the young lady to cast a

half-searching, half-coquettish look at him, and the old gentleman to begin, "Our desire, Mr. North"—but the effort was futile. Mr. James North, standing before them with folded arms, looked from the one to the other.

"I have not thought much of you for a twelvemonth," he said, quietly, "but I have not forgotten you. Come."

He led the way a few steps in advance, they following silently. In this brief interview they felt he had resumed the old dominance and independence against which they had rebelled; more than that, in this half failure of their first concerted action they had changed their querulous bickerings to a sullen distrust of each other, and walked moodily apart as they followed James North into his house. A fire blazed brightly on the hearth; a few extra seats were quickly extemporized from boxes and chests, and the elder lady, with the skirt of her dress folded over her knees—looking not unlike an exceedingly overdressed jointed doll—dried her flounces and her tears together. Miss Maria took in the scant appointments of the house in one single glance, and then fixed her

eyes upon James North, who, the least concerned of the party, stood before them, grave and patiently expectant.

"Well," began the elder lady in a high key, "after all this worry and trouble you have given us, James, haven't you anything to say? Do you know—have you the least idea what you are doing?—what egregious folly you are committing?—what everybody is saying? Eh? Heavens and earth!—do you know who I am?"

"You are my father's brother's widow, Aunt Mary," returned James quietly. "If I am committing any folly it only concerns myself. If I cared what people said I should not be here; if I loved Society enough to appreciate its good report I should stay with it."

"But they say you have run away from society to pine alone for a worthless creature—a woman who has used you, as she has used and thrown away others—a——"

"A woman," chimed in Dick, who had thrown himself on James's bed while his patent leathers were drying—"a woman that all the fellers know never intended"—here, however, he met James North's eye, and muttering something

about "whole thing being too idiotic to talk about," relapsed into silence.

"You know," continued Mrs. North, "that while we and all our set shut our eyes to your very obvious relations with that woman, and while I myself often spoke of it to others as a simple flirtation, and averted a scandal for your sake, and when the climax was reached, and she herself gave you an opportunity to sever your relations, and nobody need have been wiser—and she'd have had all the blame—and it's only what she's accustomed to—you—you! you, James North—you must nonsensically go, and, by this extravagant piece of idiocy and sentimental tomfoolery, let everybody see how serious the whole affair was, and how deep it hurt you! and here in this awful place, alone—where you're half drowned to get to it, and are willing to be wholly drowned to get away! Oh, don't talk to me! I won't hear it—it's just too idiotic for anything!"

The subject of this outburst neither spoke not moved a single muscle.

"Your aunt, Mr. North, speaks excitedly," said the elder gentleman; "yet I think she does

not overestimate the unfortunate position in which your odd fancy places you. I know nothing of the reasons that have impelled you to this step; I only know that the popular opinion is that the cause is utterly inadequate. You are still young, with a future before you. I need not say how your present conduct may imperil that. If you expected to achieve any good—even to your own satisfaction—by this conduct——"

"Yes—if there was anything to be gained by it!" broke in Mrs. North.

"If you ever thought she'd come back!—but that kind of woman don't. They must have change. Why?" began Dick suddenly, and as suddenly lying down again.

"Is this all you have come to say?" asked James North, after a moment's patient silence, looking from one to the other.

"All?" screamed Mrs. North; is it not enough?"

"Not to change my mind nor my residence at present," replied North, coolly.

"Do you mean to continue this folly all your life?——"

"And have a Coroner's inquest, and advertisements and all the facts in the papers?"

"And have *her* read the melancholy details, and know that you were faithful and she was not?"

This last shot was from the gentle Maria, who bit her lips as it glanced from the immovable man.

"I believe that is all to be said," continued North, quietly. "I am willing to believe your intentions are as worthy as your zeal. Let us say no more," he added, with grave weariness. "The tide is rising, and your coachman is signalling you from the bank."

There was no mistaking the unshaken positiveness of the man, which was all the more noticeable from its gentle but utter indifference as to the wishes of the party. He turned his back upon them as they gathered hurriedly around the elder gentleman, while the words, "He cannot be in his right mind," "It's your duty to do it," "It's sheer insanity," "Look at his eye!" (Dick *dixit*), &c., fell unconsciously upon his ear.

"One word more, Mr. North," said the elder

gentleman, a little portentously, to conceal an evident embarrassment. "It may be that your conduct might suggest to minds more practical than your own the existence of some aberration of the intellect—some temporary mania—that might force your best friends into a quasi-legal attitude of——"

"Declaring me insane," interrupted James North, with the slight impatience of a man more anxious to end a prolix interview than combat an argument. "I think differently. As my aunt's lawyer, you know that within the last year I have deeded most of my property to her and her family I cannot believe that so shrewd an adviser as Mr. Henry Carter would ever permit proceedings that would invalidate that conveyance."

Maria burst into a laugh of such wicked gratification that James North, for the first time, raised his eyes with something of interest to her face. She colored under them, but returned his glance with another like a bayonet flash. The party slowly moved toward the door, James North following.

"Then this is your final answer?" asked

Mrs. North, stopping imperiously on the threshold.

"I beg your pardon?" queried North, half-abstractedly.

"Your final answer!"

"Oh, certainly."

Mrs. North flounced away a dozen rods in rage. This was unfortunate for North. It gave them a final attack in detail. Dick began: "Come along! You know you can advertise for her with a personal down there, and the old woman wouldn't object as long as you were careful and put in an appearance now and then!"

As Dick limped away, Mr. Carter thought, in confidence, that the whole matter—even to suit Mr. North's sensitive nature—might be settled there. "*She* evidently expects you to return. My opinion is that she never left San Francisco. You can't tell anything about these women."

With this last sentence on his indifferent ear, James North seemed to be left free. Maria had rejoined her mother; but as they crossed the ford, and an intervening sand hill hid the

others from sight, that piquant young lady suddenly appeared on the hill and stood before him.

"And you're not coming back?" she said directly.

"No."

"Never?"

"I cannot say."

"Tell me what is there about some women to make men love them so?"

"Love!" replied North, quietly.

"No, it cannot be—it is not *that!*"

North looked over the hill and round the hill, and looked bored.

"O, I'm going now. But one moment, Jem! I didn't want to come. They dragged me here. Good-by."

She raised a burning face and eyes to his. He leaned forward and imprinted the perfunctory cousinly kiss of the period upon her cheek.

"Not that way," she said angrily, clutching his wrists with her long, thin fingers: "you shan't kiss me in that way, James North."

With the faintest, ghost-like passing of a

twinkle in the corners of his sad eyes, he touched his lips to hers. With the contact, she caught him round the neck, pressed her burning lips and face to his own, to his forehead, his cheeks, the very curves of his chin and throat, and—with a laugh was gone.

Had the kinsfolk of James North any hope that their visit might revive some lingering desire he still combated to enter once more the world they represented—that hope would have soon died. Whatever effect this episode had upon the solitary—and he had become so self-indulgent of his sorrow, and so careless of all that came between him and it, as to meet opposition with profound indifference—whatever appreciable result there was in this especial contact, was a greater attraction for the solitude that protected him, and he grew even to love the bleak shore and barren sands that had proved so inhospitable to them. There was a new meaning to the roar of the surges, an honest, loyal sturdiness in the unchanging persistency of the uncouth and blustering trade

winds, and a mute fidelity in the shining sands, treacherous to all but him. With such base dogs to lie in wait for trespassers, should he not be grateful?

If no bitterness was awakened by the repeated avowal of the unfaithfulness of the woman he loved, it was because he had always made the observation and experience of others give way to the dominance of his own insight. No array of contradictory facts ever shook his belief or unbelief; like all egotists, he accepted them as truths controlled by a larger truth of which he was cognizant. His simplicity, which was but another form of his egotism, was so complete as to baffle ordinary malicious cunning, and so he was spared the experience and knowledge that comes to a lower nature, and helps debase it.

Exercise and the stimulus of the few wants that sent him hunting or fishing kept up his physical health. Never a lover of rude freedom or outdoor life, his sedentary predilections and nice tastes kept him from lapsing into barbarian excess; never a sportsman, he followed the chase with no feverish exaltation. Even

dumb creatures found out his secret, and at times, stalking moodily over the upland, the brown deer and elk would cross his path without fear or molestation, or, idly lounging in his canoe within the river bar, flocks of wild fowl would settle within stroke of his listless oar. And so the second winter of his hermitage drew near its close, and with it came a storm that passed into local history and is still remembered. It uprooted giant trees along the river, and with them the tiny rootlets of the life he was idly fostering.

The morning had been fitfully turbulent, the wind veering several points south and west, with suspicious lulls, unlike the steady onset of the regular southwest trades. High overhead the long manes of racing *cirro stratus* streamed with flying gulls and hurrying water fowl; plover piped incessantly, and a flock of timorous sand pipers sought the low ridge of his cabin, while a wrecking crew of curlew hastily manned the uprooted tree that tossed wearily beyond the bar. By noon the flying clouds huddled together in masses, and then were as suddenly blown in one vast opaque sheet over

the heavens. The sea became gray—and suddenly wrinkled and old. There was a dumb, half-articulate cry in the air—rather a confusion of many sounds, as of the booming of distant guns, the clangor of a bell, the trampling of many waves, the creaking of timbers and soughing of leaves, that sank and fell ere you could yet distinguish them. And then it came on to blow. For two hours it blew strongly. At the time the sun should have set the wind had increased, and in fifteen minutes darkness shut down ; even the white sands lost their outlines, and sea, and shore, and sky were within the grip of a relentless and aggressive hand.

Within his cabin, by the leaping light of his gusty fire, North sat alone. His first curiosity passed, the turmoil without no longer carried his thought beyond its one converging centre. She had come to him on the wings of the storm, even as she had been borne to him on the summer fog cloud. Now and then the wind shook the cabin, but he heeded it not. He had no fears for its safety ; it presented its low gable to the full fury of the wind that year by year had piled, and even now was piling,

protecting buttresses of sand against it. With each succeeding gust it seemed to nestle more closely to its foundations, in the whirl of flying sand that rattled against its roof and windows. It was nearly midnight when a sudden thought brought him to his feet. What if *she* were exposed to the fury of such a night as this? What could he do to help her? Perhaps, even now, as he sat there idle, she—— Hark! was not that a gun—No? Yes, surely.

He hurriedly unbolted the door, but the strength of the wind and the impact of drifting sand resisted his efforts. With a new and feverish force within him he forced it open wide enough to permit his egress, when the wind caught him as a feather, rolled him over and over, and then, grappling him again, held him down hard and fast against the drift. Unharmed, but, unable to move, he lay there, hearing the multitudinous roar of the storm, but unable to distinguish one familiar sound in the savage medley. At last he managed to crawl flat on his face to the cabin, and refastening the door, threw himself upon his bed.

He was awakened from a fitful dream of his

Cousin Maria, who with a supernatural strength seemed to be holding the door against some unseen, unknown power that moaned and strove without, and threw itself in despairing force against the cabin. He could see the lithe undulations of her form as she alternately yielded to its power, and again drew the door against it, coiling herself around the log-hewn doorpost with a hideous snake-like suggestion. And then a struggle and a heavy blow which shook the very foundations of the structure awoke him. He leaped to his feet, and into an inch of water. By the flickering firelight he could see it oozing and dripping from the crevices of the logs and broadening into a pool by the chimney. A scrap of paper torn from an envelope was floating idly on its current. Was it the overflow of the backed-up waters of the river? He was not left long in doubt. Another blow upon the gable of the house and a torrent of spray leaped down the chimney, scattered the embers far and wide, and left him in utter darkness. Some of the spray clung to his lips. It was salt. The ocean had beaten down the river bar and was upon him.

Was there aught to fly to? No! The cabin stood upon the highest point of the sand spit, and the low swale on one side crossed by his late visitors was a seething mass of breakers, while the estuary behind him was now the ocean itself. There was nothing to do but to wait.

The very helplessness of his situation was, to a man of his peculiar temperament, an element of patient strength. The instinct of self-preservation was still strong in him, but he had no fear of death, nor, indeed, any presentiment of it; yet if it came it was an easy solution of the problem that had been troubling him, and it wiped off the slate! He thought of the sarcastic prediction of his cousin, and death in the form that threatened him was the obliteration of his home and even the ground upon which it stood. There would be nothing to record—no stain could come upon the living. The instinct that kept him true to *her* would tell her how he died; if it did not, it was equally well. And with this simple fatalism his only belief, this strange man groped his way to his bed, lay down, and in a few moments was asleep. The storm

still roared without. Once again the surges leaped against the cabin, but it was evident that the wind was abating with the tide.

When he awoke it was high noon, and the sun was shining brightly. For some time he lay in a delicious languor, doubting if he was alive or dead, but feeling through every nerve and fibre an exquisite sense of peace—a rest he had not known since his boyhood—a relief he scarcely knew from what. He felt that he was smiling, and yet his pillow was wet with the tears that glittered still on his lashes. The sand still blocking up his doorway, he leapt lightly from his window. A few clouds were still sailing slowly in the heavens, the trailing plumes of a great benediction that lay on sea and shore. He scarcely recognized the familiar landscape; a new bar had been formed in the river, and a narrow causeway of sand that crossed the lagoon and marshes to the river bank and the upland trail seemed to bring him nearer to humanity again. He was conscious of a fresh, childlike delight in all this, and when, a moment later, he saw the old uprooted tree, now apparently forever moored and im-

bedded in the sand beside his cabin, he ran to it with a sense of joy.

Its trailing roots were festooned with clinging sea weed and the long, snaky, undulating stems of the sea turnip; and fixed between two crossing roots was a bamboo orange crate almost intact. As he walked toward it he heard a strange cry—unlike anything the barren sands had borne before. Thinking it might be some strange sea bird caught in the meshes of the sea weed, he ran to the crate and looked within. It was half filled with sea moss and feathery algæ. The cry was repeated. He brushed aside the weeds with his hands. It was not a wounded sea bird, but a living human child!

As he lifted it from its damp enwrappings he saw that it was an infant eight or nine months old. How and when it had been brought there or what force had guided that elfish cradle to his very door he could not determine, but it must have been left early, for it was quite warm and its clothing almost dried by the blazing morning sun. To wrap his coat about it, to run to his cabin with it, to start out again with

the appalling conviction that nothing could be done for it there, occupied some moments. His nearest neighbor was Trinidad Joe, a "logger," three miles up the river. He remembered to have heard vaguely that he was a man of family. To half strangle the child with a few drops from his whisky flask, to extricate his canoe from the marsh, and strike out into the river with his waif, was at least to do something. In half an hour he had reached the straggling cabin and sheds of "Trinidad Joe," and from the few scanty flowers that mingled with the brush-wood fence, and a surplus of linen fluttering on the line, he knew that his surmise as to Trinidad Joe's domestic establishment was correct.

The door at which he knocked opened upon a neat, plainly-furnished room, and the figure of a buxom woman of twenty-five. With an awkwardness new to him, North stammered out the circumstances of his finding the infant and the object of his visit. Before he had finished the woman had taken the child, by some feminine trick, out of his hands 'ere he knew it—and when he paused, out of breath, burst into a fit

of laughter. North tried to laugh, too, but failed.

When the woman had wiped the tears from a pair of very frank blue eyes, and hidden two rows of very strong white teeth again, she said:

"Look yar! You're that looney sort o' chap that lives alone over on the spit yonder—ain't ye?"

North hastened to admit all that the statement might imply.

"And so ye'v had a baby left ye to keep you company? Lordy!" Here she looked as if dangerously near a relapse, and then added, as if in explanation of her conduct:

"When I saw ye paddlin' down here—you that ez shy as elk in summer—I sez, 'He's sick.' But a baby? Oh, Lordy!"

For a moment North almost hated her. A woman who, in this pathetic, perhaps almost tragic, picture saw only a ludicrous image, and that image himself, was of another race than that he had ever mingled with. Profoundly indifferent as he had always been to the criticism of his equals in station, the mischievous laughter of this illiterate woman jarred upon

him worse than his cousin's sarcasm. It was with a little dignity that he pointed out the fact that at present the child needed nourishment. "It's very young," he added. "I'm afraid it wants its natural nourishment."

"Whar is it to get it?" asked the woman.

James North hesitated and looked around. There should be a baby somewhere!—there must be a baby somewhere! "I thought that you," he stammered, conscious of an awkward coloring—"I—that is—I——" He stopped short, for she was already cramming her apron into her mouth, too late, however, to stop the laugh that overflowed it. When she found her breath again she said:

"Look yar! I don't wonder they said you was looney! I'm Trinidad Joe's onmarried darter and the only woman in this house. Any fool could have told you that. Now, ef you can rig us up a baby out o' them facts, I'd like to see it done."

Inwardly furious but outwardly polite, James North begged her pardon, deplored his ignorance, and, with a courtly bow, made a movement to take the child. But the woman as quickly drew it away.

"Not much," she said, hastily. "What! trust that poor critter to you? No, sir. Thar's more ways of feeding a baby, young man, than you knows on, with all your 'nat'ral nourishment.' But it looks kinder logy and stupid."

North freezingly admitted that he had given the infant whisky as a stimulant.

"You did? Come, now—that ain't so looney after all. Well, I'll take the baby, and when Dad comes home we'll see what can be done."

North hesitated. His dislike of the woman was intense, and yet he knew no one else, and the baby needed instant care. Besides, he began to see the ludicrousness of his making a first call on his neighbors with a foundling to dispose of. She saw his hesitation, and said:

"Ye don't know me, in course. Well, I'm Bessie Robinson. Trinidad Joe Robinson's daughter. I reckon Dad will give me a character if you want references, or any of the boys on the river."

"I'm only thinking of the trouble I'm giving you, Miss Robinson, I assure you. Any expense you may incur——"

"Young man," said Bessie Robinson, turning

sharply on her heel, and facing him with her black brows a little contracted, "if it comes to expenses, I reckon I'll pay you for that baby, or not take it at all. But I don't know you well enough to quarrel with you on sight. So leave the child to me, and, if you choose, paddle down here to-morrow, after sun up—the ride will do you good—and see it, and Dad thrown in. So long!" and with one powerful but well-shaped arm thrown around the child, and the other crooked at the dimpled elbow a little aggressively, she swept by James North and entered a bedroom, closing the door behind her.

When Mr. James North reached his cabin it was dark. As he rebuilt his fire, and tried to rearrange the scattered and disordered furniture and remove the débris of last night's storm, he was conscious for the first time of feeling lonely. He did not miss the child. Beyond the instincts of humanity and duty he had really no interest in its welfare or future. He was rather glad to get rid of it—he would have preferred to some one else, and yet she looked as if she were competent. And then came the reflection that since the morning he had not once thought

of the woman he loved. The like had never occurred in his twelvemonth solitude. So he set to work, thinking of her, and of his sorrows, until the word "looney," in connection with his suffering, flashed across his memory. "Looney!" It was not a nice word. It suggested something less than insanity; something that might happen to a common, unintellectual sort of person. He remembered the loon—an ungainly feathered neighbor—who was popularly supposed to have lent his name to the adjective. Could it be possible that people looked upon him as one too hopelessly and uninterestingly afflicted for sympathy or companionship, too unimportant and common for even ridicule—or was this but the coarse interpretation of that vulgar girl?

Nevertheless the next morning after "sun up" James North was at Trinidad Joe's cabin. That worthy proprietor himself—a long lank man, with even more than the ordinary rural Western characteristics of ill health, ill-feeding, and melancholy—met him on the bank, clothed in a manner and costume that was a singular combination of the frontiersman and sailor. When

North had again related the story of his finding the child, Trinidad Joe pondered.

"It mout hev been stowed away in one of them crates for safe keeping," he said musingly, "and washed off the deck of one o' them Tahiti brigs goin' down fer oranges. Leastways, it never got thar from these parts."

"But it's a miracle its life was saved at all. It must have been some hours in the water."

"Them brigs lays their course well in shore, and it was just mebbe a toss up if the vessel clawed off the reef at all! And ez to the child keepin' up, why, dog my skin! that's just the contrariness o' things," continued Joe, in sententious cynicism. "Ef an able seaman had fallen from the yardarm that night he'd been sunk in sight o' the ship, and thet baby ez can't swim a stroke sails ashore, sound asleep, with the waves for a baby jumper."

North, who was half relieved, yet half awkwardly disappointed at not seeing Bessy, ventured to ask how the child was doing.

"She'll do all right now," said a frank voice above, and, looking up, North discerned the round arms, blue eyes, and white teeth of the

daughter at the window. "She's all hunky, and has an appetite—ef she hezn't got her 'natural nourishment.' Come, dad! heave ahead, and tell the stranger what you and me allow we'll do—and don't stand there swappin' lies with him."

"Weel," said Trinidad Joe, dejectedly, "Bess allows she can rare that baby and do justice to it. And I don't say—though I'm her father—that she can't. But when Bess want's anything she wants it all, clean down, no half-ways, nor leavins for her."

"That's me! go on, dad—you're chippin' in the same notch—every time," said Miss Robinson, with cheerful directness.

"Well, we agree to put the job up this way. We'll take the child and you'll give us a paper or writing makin' over all your right and title. How's that?"

Without knowing exactly why he did, Mr. James objected decidedly.

"Do you think we won't take good care of it?" asked Miss Bessie, sharply.

"That is not the question," said North a little hotly. "In the first place, the child is not mine

to give. It has fallen into my hands as a trust —the first hands that received it from its parents. I do not think it right to allow any other hands to come between their hands and mine."

Miss Bessie left the window. In another moment she appeared from the house, and, walking directly toward North, held out a somewhat substantial hand. "Good," she said, as she gave his fingers an honest squeeze. "You ain't so looney after all. Dad, he's right! He shan't gin it up—but we'll go halves in it, he and me. He'll be father and I'll be mother 'till death do us part, or the reg'lar family turns up. Well—what do you say?"

More pleased than he dared confess to himself with the praise of this common girl, Mr. James North assented. Then would he see the baby? He would, and "Trinidad Joe" having already seen the baby, and talked of the baby, and felt the baby, and indeed had the baby offered to him in every way during the past night, concluded to give some of his valuable time to logging, and left them together.

Mr. North was obliged to admit that the baby was thriving. He moreover listened with polite

interest to the statement that the baby's eyes were hazel, like his own, that it had five teeth, that she was, for a girl of that probable age, a robust child, and yet Mr. North lingered. Finally, with his hand on the door lock, he turned to Bessie and said :

"May I ask you an odd question, Miss Robinson ?"

"Go on."

"Why did you think I was—'looney ?'"

The frank Miss Robinson bent her head over the baby.

"Why ?"

"Yes, why ?"

"Because you *were* looney."

"Oh."

"But——"

"Yes——"

"You'll get over it."

And under the shallow pretext of getting the baby's food, she retired to the kitchen, where Mr. North had the supreme satisfaction of seeing her, as he passed the window, sitting on a chair with her apron over her head, shaking with laughter.

For the next two or three days he did not visit the Robinsons, but gave himself up to past memories. On the third day he had—it must be confessed not without some effort—brought himself into that condition of patient sorrow that had been his habit. The episode of the storm and the finding of the baby began to fade, as had faded the visit of his relatives. It had been a dull, wet day, and he was sitting by his fire, when there came a tap at his door. "Flora," by which juvenescent name his aged Indian handmaid was known, usually announced her presence with an imitation of a curlew's cry; it could not be her. He fancied he heard the trailing of a woman's dress against the boards, and started to his feet, deathly pale, with a name upon his lips. But the door was impatiently thrown open, and showed Bessie Robinson! And the baby!

With a feeling of relief he could not understand, he offered her a seat. She turned her frank eyes on him curiously.

"You look skeert!"

"I was startled. You know I see nobody here!"

"Thet's so. But look yar, do you ever use a doctor?"

Not clearly understanding her, he in turn asked, "Why?"

"'Cause you must rise up and get one now—thet's why. This yer baby of ours is sick. We don't use a doctor at our house, we don't beleeve in 'em, hain't no call for 'em—but this yer baby's parents mebbee did. So rise up out o' that cheer, and get one."

James North looked at Miss Robinson and rose, albeit a little in doubt and hesitating.

Miss Robinson saw it. "I shouldn't hev troubled ye, nor ridden three miles to do it, if ther hed been any one else to send. But dad's over at Eureka buying logs, and I'm alone. Hello—wher yer goin'?"

North had seized his hat and opened the door.

"For a doctor," he replied amazedly.

"Did ye kalkilate to walk six miles and back?"

"Certainly—I have no horse."

"But *I* have, and you'll find her tethered outside. She ain't much to look at, but when you strike the trail she'll go."

"But *you*—how will *you* return?"

"Well," said Miss Robinson, drawing her chair to the fire, taking off her hat and shawl, and warming her knees by the blaze, "I didn't reckon to return. You'll find me here when you come back with the doctor. Go! Skedaddle quick."

She did not have to repeat the command. In another instant James North was in Miss Bessie's seat—a man's dragoon saddle—and pounding away through the sand. Two facts were in his mind: one was that he, the "looney," was about to open communication with the wisdom and contemporary criticism of the settlement by going for a doctor to administer to a sick and anonymous infant in his possession; the other was that his solitary house was in the hands of a self-invited, large-limbed, illiterate, but rather comely young woman. These facts he could not gallop away from, but to his credit be it recorded that he fulfilled his mission zealously, if not coherently, to the Doctor, who during the rapid ride gathered the idea that North had rescued a young married woman from drowning, who had since given birth to a child.

CHAPTER II.

THE few words that set the Doctor right when he arrived at the cabin, might in any other community have required further explanation, but Dr. Duchesne, an old army surgeon, was prepared for everything and indifferent to all. "The infant," he said, "was threatened with inflammation of the lungs, at present there was no danger, but the greatest care and caution must be exercised. Particularly exposure should be avoided." "That settles the whole matter then," said Bessie potentially. Both gentlemen looked their surprise. "It means," she condescended to further explain, "that *you* must ride that filly home, wait for the old man to come to-morrow, and then ride back here with some of my duds, for thar's no 'da'das' or picknicking for that baby until she's better. And I reckon to stay with her ontil she is."

"She certainly is unable to bear any exposure at present," said the Doctor, with an amused

side glance at North's perplexed face. "Miss Robinson is right. I'll ride with you over the sands as far as the trail."

"I'm afraid," said North, feeling it incumbent upon him to say something, "that you'll hardly find it as comfortable here as——"

"I reckon not," she said simply, "but I didn't expect much."

North turned a little wearily away. "Good night," she said suddenly, extending her hand, with a gentler smile of lip and eye than he had ever before noticed, "Good night—take good care of Dad."

The Doctor and North rode together some moments in silence. North had another fact presented to him, *i.e.*, that he was going a visiting, and that he had virtually abandoned his former life; also that it would be profanation to think of his sacred woe in the house of a stranger.

"I dare say," said the Doctor, suddenly, "you are not familiar with the type of woman Miss Bessie presents so perfectly. Your life has been spent among the conventional class."

North froze instantly at what seemed to be a

probing of his secret. Disregarding the last suggestion, he made answer simply and truthfully that he had never met any Western girl like Bessie.

"That's your bad luck," said the Doctor. "You think her coarse and illiterate?"

Mr. North had been so much struck with her kindness that really he had not thought of it.

"That's not so," said the Doctor, curtly, "although even if you told her so she would not think any the less of you—nor of herself. If she spoke rustic Greek instead of bad English, and wore a *cestus* in place of an ill-fitting corset, you'd swear she was a Goddess. There's your trail. Good night."

James North did not sleep well that night. He had taken Miss Bessie's bedroom, at her suggestion, there being but two, and "Dad never using sheets and not bein' keerful in his habits." It was neat but that was all. The scant ornamentation was atrocious; two or three highly-colored prints, a shell workbox, a ghastly winter bouquet of skeleton leaves and mosses, a star fish, and two china vases hideous enough to have been worshipped as Buddhist

idols, exhibited the gentle recreation of the fair occupant, and the possible future education of the child. In the morning he was met by Joe, who received the message of his daughter with his usual dejection, and suggested that North stay with him until the child was better. That event was still remote; North found, on his return to his cabin, that the child had been worse; but he did not know, until Miss Bessie dropped a casual remark, that she had not closed her own eyes that night. It was a week before he regained his own quarters, but an active week—indeed, on the whole, a rather pleasant week. For there was a delicate flattery in being domineered by a wholesome and handsome woman, and Mr. James North had by this time made up his mind that she was both. Once or twice he found himself contemplating her splendid figure with a recollection of the Doctor's compliment, and later, emulating her own frankness, told her of it.

"And what did you say?" she asked.

"O, I laughed and said—nothing."

And so did she.

A month after this interchange of frankness,

she asked him if he could spend the next evening at her house. "You see," she said, "thar's to be a dance down at the Hall at Eureka, and I haven't kicked a fut since last spring. Hank Fisher's comin' up to take me over, and I'm goin' to let the shanty slide for the night."

"But what's to become of the baby?" asked North, a little testily.

"Well," said Miss Robinson, facing him somewhat aggressively, "I reckon it won't hurt ye to take care of it for a night. Dad can't—and if he could, he don't know how. Liked to hev pizened me after Mar died. No, young man, I don't propose to ask Hank Fisher to tote thet child over to Eureka and back, and spile his fun."

"Then I suppose I must make way for Mr. Hank—Hank—Fisher?" said North, with the least tinge of sarcasm in his speech.

"Of course. You've got nothing else to do, you know."

North would have given worlds to have pleaded a previous engagement on business of importance—but he knew that Bessie spoke

truly. He had nothing to do. "And Fisher has, I suppose?" he asked.

"Of course—to look after *me!*"

A more unpleasant evening James North had not spent since the first day of his solitude. He almost began to hate the unconscious cause of his absurd position as he paced up and down the floor with it. "Was there ever such egregious folly," he began, but remembering he was quoting Maria North's favorite *resumé* of his own conduct, he stopped. The child cried, missing, no doubt, the full rounded curves and plump arm of its nurse. North danced it violently, with an inward accompaniment that was not musical, and thought of the other dancers. "Doubtless," he mused, "she has told this beau of hers that she has left the baby with the 'looney' man on the beach. Perhaps I may be offered a permanent engagement as a harmless simpleton accustomed to the care of children. Mothers may cry for me. The Doctor is at Eureka. Of course, he will be there to see his untranslated Goddess, and condole with her over the imbecility of the Man on the Beach. Once he carelessly asked Joe who the company were."

"Well," said Joe, mournfully, "thar's Widder Higsby, and darter, the four Stubbs gals—in course Polly Doble will be on hand with that feller that's clerking over at the Head for Jones, and Jones's wife. Then thar's French Pete, and Whiskey Ben, and that chap that shot Archer—I disremember his name, and the barber—what's that little mulatto's name—that 'ar Kanaka? I swow!" continued Joe, drearily, "I'll be forgettin' my own next—and——"

"That will do," interrupted North, only half concealing his disgust as he rose and carried the baby to the other room, beyond the reach of names that might shock its ladylike ears. The next morning he met the from-dance-returning Bessie abstractedly, and soon took his leave, full of a disloyal plan, conceived in the sleeplessness of her own bedchamber. He was satisfied that he owed a duty to its unknown parents to remove the child from the degrading influences of the barber Kanaka, and Hank Fisher especially, and he resolved to write to his relatives, stating the case, asking a home for the waif and assistance to find its parents. He addressed this letter to his cousin Maria,

partly in consideration of the dramatic farewell of that young lady, and its possible influence in softening her stony heart toward his protégé. He then quietly settled back to his old solitary habits, and for a week left the Robinsons unvisited. The result was a morning call by "Trinidad Joe" on the hermit. "It's a whim o' my gal's, Mr. North," he said, dejectedly, "and ez I told you before and warned ye, when that gal hez an idee, fower yoke of oxen and seving men can't drag it outer her. She's got a idee o' larnin'—never hevin' hed much schoolin', and we ony takin' the papers, permiskiss like—and she says *you* can teach her —not hevin' anything else to do. Do ye folly me?"

"Yes," said North, "certainly."

"Well, she allows ez mebbee you're proud, and didn't like her takin' care of the baby for nowt; and she reckons that ef you'll gin her some book larnin' and get her to sling some fancy talk in fashn'ble style—why, she'll call it squar."

"You can tell her," said North, very honestly, "that I shall be only too glad to help her in

any way, without ever hoping to cancel my debt of obligation to her."

"Then it's a go?" said the mystified Joe, with a desperate attempt to convey the foregoing statement into his own intellect in three Saxon words.

"It's a go," replied North, cheerfully.

And he felt relieved. For he was not quite satisfied with his own want of frankness to her. But here was a way to pay off the debt he owed her, and yet retain his own dignity. And now he could tell her what he had done, and he trusted to the ambitious instinct that prompted her to seek a better education to explain his reasons for it.

He saw her that evening and confessed all to her frankly. She kept her head averted, but when she turned her blue eyes to him they were wet with honest tears. North had a man's horror of a ready feminine lachrymal gland; but it was not like Bessie to cry, and it meant something; and then shedid it in a large goddess-like way, without sniffling, or choking, or getting her nose red, but rather with a gentle deliquescence, a harmonious melting, so that

he was fain to comfort her with nearer contact, gentleness in his own sad eyes, and a pressure of her large hand.

"It's all right, I s'pose," she said, sadly; "but I didn't reckon on yer havin' any relations, but thought you were alone, like me."

James North, thinking of Hank Fisher and the "Mullater," could not help intimating that his relations were very wealthy and fashionable people, and had visited him last summer. A recollection of the manner in which they had so visited him, and his own reception of them, prevented his saying more. But Miss Bessie could not forego a certain feminine curiosity, and asked:

"Did they come with Sam Baker's team?"

"Yes."

"Last July?"

"Yes."

"And Sam drove the horses here for a bite?"

"I believe so."

"And them's your relations?"

"They are."

Miss Robinson reached over the cradle and

enfolded the sleeping infant in her powerful arms. Then she lifted her eyes, wrathful through her still glittering tears, and said, slowly: "They don't — have — this — child — then!"

"But why?"

"Oh, why? *I* saw them! That's why, and enough! You can't play any such gay and festive skeletons on this poor baby for flesh and blood parents. No, sir!"

"I think you judge them hastily, Miss Bessie," said North, secretly amused; "my aunt may not, at first, favorably impress strangers; yet she has many friends. But, surely, you do not object to my cousin Maria, the young lady?"

"What! that dried cuttle-fish, with nothing livin' about her but her eyes? James North, ye may be a fool like the old woman—perhaps it's in the family—but ye ain't a devil, like that gal! That ends it."

And it did. North despatched a second letter to Maria saying that he had already made other arrangements for the baby. Pleased with her easy victory, Miss Bessie became more than usually gracious, and the next day bowed her

shapely neck meekly to the yoke of her teacher, and became a docile pupil. James North could not have helped to notice her ready intelligence, even had he been less prejudged in her favor, than he was fast becoming now. If he had found it pleasant before to be admonished by her, there was a still more delicious flattery in her perfect trust in his omniscient skill, as a pilot over this unknown sea. There was a certain enjoyment in guiding her hand over the writing book, that I fear he could not have been taught by an intellect less graciously sustained by its physical nature. The weeks flew quickly by on gossamer wings, and when she placed a bunch of larkspurs and poppies in his hand one morning, he knew for the first time that it was spring.

I cannot say that there was more to record of Miss Bessie's education than this. Once North, half jestingly, remarked that he had never yet seen her admirer, Mr. Hank Fisher. Miss Bessie (coloring but cool)—"You never will!" North (white but hot)—"Why?" Miss Bessie (faintly)—"I'd rather not." North (resolutely)—"I insist." Bessie (yielding)—"As my

teacher?" North (hesitatingly, at the limitation of the epithet)—"Y-e-e-s!" Bessie—"And you'll promise never to speak of it again?" North—"Never." Bessie (slowly)—"Well, he said I did an awful thing to go over to your cabin and stay." North (in the genuine simplicity of a refined nature)—"But why?" Miss Bessie (half piqued, but absolutely admiring that nature)—"Quit! and keep your promise!"

They were so happy in these new relations that it occurred to Miss Bessie one day to take James North to task for obliging her to ask to be his pupil. "You know how ignorant I was," she added, and Mr. North retorted by relating to her the Doctor's criticism on her independence. "To tell you the truth," he added, "I'm afraid you would not take it so kindly as he said."

"That is, you thought me as vain as yourself! It seems to me you and the Doctor had a great deal to say to each other."

"On the contrary," laughed North, "that was all we said."

"And you didn't make fun of me?"

Perhaps it was not necessary for North to

take her hand to emphasize his denial, but he did.

Miss Bessie, being still reminiscent, perhaps did not notice it. "If it hadn't been for that ar —I mean that thur—no, that baby—I wouldn't have known you!" she said, dreamily.

"No," returned North, mischievously, "but you still would have known Hank Fisher."

No woman is perfect. Miss Bessie looked at him with a sudden—her first and last—flash of coquetry. Then stooped and kissed—the baby.

James North was a simple gentleman, but not altogether a fool. He returned the kiss, but not vicariously.

There was a footstep on the porch. These two turned the hues of a dying dolphin, and then laughed. It was Joe. He held a newspaper in his hand. "I reckon ye woz right, Mr. North, about my takin' these yar papers reg'lar. For I allow here's suthin' that may clar up the mystery o' that baby's parents." With the hesitation of a slowly grappling intellect, Joe sat down on the table and read from the San Francisco *Herald* as follows: "It is

now ascertained beyond doubt that the wreck reported by the Æolus was the American brig Pomare, bound hence to Tahiti. The worst surmises are found correct. The body of the woman has been since identified as that of the beau-ti-ful daughter of—of—of—Terp—Terp—Terpish—nell. I swow that name just tackles me."

"Gin it to me, Dad," said Bessie pertly. "You never had any education, anyway. Hear your accomplished daughter." With a mock bow to the new schoolmaster, and a capital burlesque of a confident school girl, she strode to the middle of the room, the paper held and folded bookwise in her hands. "Ahem! Where did you leave off? O, 'the beautiful daughter of Terpsichore—whose name was prom-i-nently connected with a mysterious social scandal of last year—the gifted, but unfortunate Grace Chatterton——' No—don't stop me—there's some more! 'The body of her child, a lovely infant of six months, has not been recovered, and it is supposed was washed overboard.' There may be there's the child, Mr. North. Why, Dad! Look, O my God! He's falling.

Mr. North! James! Speak to me; speak, my darling."

Her strong arm had anticipated her father's. She caught him, lifted him to the bed, on which he lay, to all sense dead, for twenty-four hours. Then brain fever supervened, and delirium, and Dr. Duchesne telegraphed for his friends, but at the end of a week and the opening of a summer day the storm passed, as the other storm had passed, and he awoke, languid, but at peace. Bessie was at his side—he was glad to see—alone. "Bessie, dear," he said feebly, "when I am stronger I have something to tell you."

"I knew it all, Jem," she said with a trembling lip; "I heard it all—no, not from *them*, but from your own lips in your delirium. I'm glad it came from *you*—even then."

"Do you forgive me, Bessie?"

She pressed her lips to his forehead and said hastily, and then falteringly, as if afraid of her impulse:

"Yes. Yes."

"And you will still be mother to the child!"

"*Her* child?"

"No, dear, not hers, but *mine!*"

She started, cried a little, and then putting her arms around him, said : "Yes."

And as there was but one way of fulfilling that sacred promise, they were married in the autumn.

THE HOODLUM BAND.

THE HOODLUM BAND;

OR,

THE BOY CHIEF, THE INFANT POLITICIAN, AND THE PIRATE PRODIGY.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a quiet New England village. Nowhere in the valley of the Connecticut the antumn sun shone upon a more peaceful, pastoral, manufacturing community. The wooden nutmegs were slowly ripening on the trees, and the white-pine hams for Western consumption were gradually rounding into form under the deft manipulation of the hardy American artisan. The honest Connecticut farmer was quietly gathering from his threshing-floor the shoe-pegs, which, when intermixed with a fair proportion of oats, offered a pleasing substitute

for fodder to the effete civilisations of Europe. An almost Sabbath-like stillness prevailed. Doemville was only seven miles from Hartford, and the surrounding landscape smiled with the conviction of being fully insured.

Few would have thought that this peaceful village was the home of the three young heroes whose exploits would hereafter—but we anticipate.

Doemville Academy was the principal seat of learning in the county. Under the grave and gentle administration of the venerable Doctor Context, it had attained just popularity. Yet the increasing infirmities of age obliged the doctor to relinquish much of his trust to his assistants, who, it is needless to say, abused his confidence. Before long their brutal tyranny and deep laid malevolence became apparent. Boys were absolutely forced to study their lessons. The sickening fact will hardly be believed, but during school-hours they were obliged to remain in their seats with the appearance at least of discipline. It is stated by good authority that the rolling of croquet-balls across the floor during recitation was objected to,

under the fiendish excuse of its interfering with their studies. The breaking of windows by base-balls, and the beating of small scholars with bats, was declared against. At last, bloated and arrogant with success, the underteachers threw aside all disguise, and revealed themselves in their true colours. A cigar was actually taken out of a day-scholar's mouth during prayers! A flask of whisky was dragged from another's desk, and then thrown out of the window. And finally, Profanity, Hazing, Theft, and Lying were almost discouraged.

Could the youth of America, conscious of their power, and a literature of their own, tamely submit to this tyranny? Never! We repeat it firmly. Never! We repeat it to parents and guardians. Never! But the fiendish tutors, chuckling in their glee, little knew what was passing through the cold, haughty intellect of Charles Francis Adams Golightly, aged ten; what curled the lip of Benjamin Franklin Jenkins, aged seven; or what shone in the bold, blue eyes of Bromley Chitterlings, aged six and a half, as they sat in the corner of the playground at recess. Their only other

companion and confidant was the negro porter and janitor of the school, known as "Pirate Jim."

Fitly, indeed, was he named, as the secrets of his early wild career—confessed freely to his noble young friends—plainly showed. A slaver at the age of seventeen, the ringleader of a mutiny on the African coast at the age of twenty, a privateersman during the last war with England, the commander of a fire-ship and its sole survivor at twenty five, with a wild, intermediate career of unmixed piracy, until the Rebellion called him to Civil Service again as a blockade runner, and peace and a desire for rural repose led him to seek the janitorship of the Doemville Academy, where no questions were asked and references not exchanged—he was, indeed, a fit mentor for our daring youth. Although a man whose days had exceeded the usual space alloted to humanity, the various episodes of his career footing his age up to nearly one hundred and fifty-nine years, he scarcely looked it, and was still hale and vigorous.

"Yes," continued Pirate Jim critically; "I don't

think he was any bigger nor you, Master Chitterlings, if as big, when he stood on the fork'stle of my ship and shot the captain o' that East Injyman dead. We used to call him little Weevils, he was so young-like. But, bless your hearts, boys! he wa'n't anything to Little Sammy Barlow, ez once crep' up inter the captain's stateroom on a Rooshin frigate, stabbed him to the heart with a jack-knife, then put on the captain's uniform and his cocked hat, took command of the ship, and fout her hisself."

"Wasn't the captain's clothes big for him?" asked B. Franklin Jenkins anxiously.

The janitor eyed young Jenkins with pained dignity.

"Didn't I say the Rooshin captain was a small, a very small, man? Rooshins is small, likewise Greeks."

A noble enthusiasm beamed in the faces of the youthful heroes.

"Was Barlow as large as me?" asked C. F. Adams Golightly, lifting his curls from his Jove-like brow.

"Yes; but, then, he hed hed, so to speak, experiences. It was allowed that he had

pizened his schoolmaster afore he went to sea. But it's dry talking, boys."

Golightly drew a flask from his jacket and handed it to the janitor. It was his father's best brandy. The heart of the honest old seaman was touched.

"Bless ye, my own pirate boy!" he said, in a voice suffocating with emotion.

"I've got some tabacco," said the youthful Jenkins, "but it's fine cut; I use only that now."

"I kin buy some plug at the corner grocery," said Pirate Jim, "only I left my portmoney at home."

"Take this watch," said young Golightly; "'tis my father's. Since he became a tyrant and usurper, and forced me to join a corsair's band, I've begun by dividing the property."

"This is idle trifling," said young Chitterlings wildly. "Every moment is precious, Is this an hour to give to wine and wassail? Ha, we want action—action! We must strike the blow for freedom to-night—ay, this very night. The scow is already anchored in the mill-dam freighted with provisions for a three-months'

voyage. I have a black flag in my pocket. Why, then, this cowardly delay?"

The two elder youths turned with a slight feeling of awe and shame to gaze on the glowing cheeks, and high, haughty crest of their youngest comrade—the bright, the beautiful Bromley Chitterlings. Alas! that very moment of forgetfulness and mutual admiration was fraught with danger. A thin, dyspeptic, half-starved tutor approached.

"It is time to resume your studies, young gentlemen," he said, with fiendish politeness.

They were his last words on earth.

"Down Tyrant!" screamed Chitterlings.

"Sic him—I mean *sic semper tyrannis!*" said the classical Golightly.

A heavy blow on the head from a base-ball bat, and the rapid projection of a base-ball against his empty stomach, brought the tutor a limp and lifeless mass to the ground. Golightly shuddered. Let not my young readers blame him too rashly. It was his first homicide.

"Search his pockets," said the practical Jenkins.

They did so, and found nothing but a Harvard Triennial Catalogue.

"Let us fly," said Jenkins.

"Forward to the boats!" cried the enthusiastic Chitterlings.

But C. F. Adams Golightly stood gazing thoughtfully at the prostrate tutor.

"This," he said calmly, "is the result of a too free government and the common-school system. What the country needs is reform. I cannot go with you, boys."

"Traitor!" screamed the others.

C. F. A. Golightly smiled sadly.

"You know me not. I shall not become a pirate—but a Congressman!"

Jenkins and Chitterlings turned pale.

"I have already organised two caucuses in a base-ball club, and bribed the delegates of another. Nay, turn not away. Let us be friends, pursuing through various ways one common end. Farewell!" They shook hands.

"But where is Pirate Jim?" asked Jenkins.

"He left us but for a moment to raise money on the watch to purchase armament for the scow. Farewell!"

And so the gallant, youthful spirits parted, bright with the sunrise of hope.

That night a conflagration raged in Doemville. The Doemville Academy, mysteriously fired, first fell a victim to the devouring element. The candy shop and cigar store, both holding heavy liabilities against the academy, quickly followed. By the lurid gleams of the flames, a long, low, sloop-rigged scow, with every mast gone except one, slowly worked her way out of the mill-dam towards the Sound. The next day three boys were missing—C. F. Adams Golightly, B. F. Jenkins, and Bromley Chitterlings. Had they perished in the flames? Who shall say? Enough that never more under these names did they again appear in the homes of their ancestors.

Happy, indeed, would it have been for Doemville had the mystery ended here. But a darker interest and scandal rested upon the peaceful village. During that awful night the boarding-school of Madame Brimborion was visited stealthily, and two of the fairest heiresses of Connecticut—daughters of the president of a savings bank and insurance

director—were the next morning found to have eloped. With them also disappeared the entire contents of the Savings Bank, and on the following day the Flamingo Fire Insurance Company failed.

CHAPTER II.

LET my young readers now sail with me to warmer and more hospitable climes. Off the coast of Patagonia a long, low, black schooner proudly rides the seas, that break softly upon the vine-clad shores of that luxuriant land. Who is this that, wrapped in Persian rugs, and dressed in the most expensive manner, calmly reclines on the quarter-deck of the schooner, toying lightly ever and anon with the luscious fruits of the vicinity, held in baskets of solid gold by Nubian slaves? or at intervals, with daring grace, guides an ebony velocipede over the polished black walnut decks, and in

and out the intricacies of the rigging? Who is it? well may be asked. What name is it that blanches with terror the cheeks of the Patagonian navy? Who but the Pirate Prodigy—the relentless Boy Scourer of Patagonian seas? Voyagers slowly drifting by the Silurian beach, coasters along the Devonian shore, still shudder at the name of Bromley Chitterlings—the Boy Avenger, late of Hartford, Connecticut.

It has been often asked by the idly curious, Why, Avenger, and of what? Let us not seek to disclose the awful secret hidden under that youthful jacket. Enough that there may have been that of bitterness in his past life that they

"Whose soul would sicken o'er the heaving wave,"

or "whose soul would heave above the sickening wave," did not understand. Only one knew him, perhaps too well—a queen of the Amazons taken prisoner off Terra del Fuego a week previous. She loved the Boy Avenger. But in vain; his youthful heart seemed obdurate.

"Hear me," at last, he said, when she had for the seventh time wildly proffered her hand and her kingdom in marriage, "and know once and

for ever why I must decline your flattering proposal. I love another."

With a wild, despairing cry she leaped into the sea, but was instantly rescued by the Pirate Prodigy. Yet, even in that supreme moment, such was his coolness, that on his way to the surface he captured a mermaid, and, placing her in charge of his steward, with directions to give her a state-room, with hot and cold water, calmly resumed his place by the Amazon's side. When the cabin door closed on his faithful servant, bringing champagne and ices to the interesting stranger, Chitterlings resumed his narrative with a choking voice:—

"When I first fled from the roof of a tyrannical parent, I loved the beautiful and accomplished Eliza J. Sniffen. Her father was president of the Working-men's Savings' Bank, and it was perfectly understood that in the course of time the entire deposits would be his. But, like a vain fool, I wished to anticipate the future, and, in a wild moment, persuaded Miss Sniffen to elope with me; and, with the entire cash assets of the bank, we fled together." He paused, overcome with emotion. "But fate

decreed it otherwise. In my feverish haste, I had forgotten to place among the stores of my pirate craft that peculiar kind of chocolate caromel to which Eliza Jane was most partial. We were obliged to put into New Rochelle on the second day out, to enable Miss Sniffen to procure that delicacy at the nearest confectioner's, and match some zephyr worsteds at the first fancy shop. Fatal mistake. She went—she never returned!" In a moment he resumed, in a choking voice, "After a week's weary waiting, I was obliged to put to sea again, bearing a broken heart and the broken bank of her father. I have never seen her since."

"And you still love her?" asked the Amazon queen, excitedly.

"Ay, for ever!"

"Noble youth. Here, take the reward of thy fidelity, for know, Bromley Chitterlings, that I am Eliza Jane. Wearied with waiting, I embarked on a Peruvian Guano ship—but it's a long story, dear."

"And altogether too thin," said the Boy Avenger, fiercely releasing himself from her encircling arms. "Eliza Jane's age, a year ago,

was only thirteen, and you are forty, if a day."

"True," she returned sadly, but I have suffered much, and time passes rapidly, and I've grown. You would scarcely believe that this is my own hair."

"I know not," he replied, in gloomy abstraction.

"Forgive my deceit," she returned. "If you are affianced to another, let me at least be—a mother to you."

The Pirate Prodigy started, and tears came to his eyes. The scene was affecting in the extreme. Several of the oldest seamen—men who had gone through scenes of suffering with tearless eyes and unblanched cheeks—now retired to the spirit room to conceal their emotion. A few went into caucus in the forecastle, and returned with the request that the Amazonian queen should hereafter be known as the "Queen of the Pirates' Isle."

"Mother!" gasped the Pirate Prodigy.

"My son!" screamed the Amazonian queen.

They embraced. At the same moment a loud flop was heard on the quarter-deck. It

was the forgotten mermaid, who, emerging from her state-room, and ascending the companion-way at that moment, had fainted at the spectacle. The Pirate Prodigy rushed to her side with a bottle of smelling-salts.

She recovered slowly. "Permit me," she said, rising with dignity, "to leave the ship. I am unaccustomed to such conduct."

"Hear me—she is my mother!"

"She certainly is old enough to be," replied the mermaid; "and to speak of that being her own hair," she said, as she rearranged, with characteristic grace, a comb, and a small hand-mirror, her own luxuriant tresses.

"If I couldn't afford any other clothes, I might wear a switch, too!" hissed the Amazonian queen. "I suppose you don't dye it on account of the salt water? But perhaps you prefer green, dear?"

"A little salt water might improve your own complexion, love."

"Fishwoman!" screamed the Amazonian queen.

"Bloomerite!" shrieked the mermaid.

In another instant they had seized each other.

"Mutiny! Overboard with them!" cried the Pirate Prodigy, rising to the occasion, and casting aside all human affection in the peril of the moment.

A plank was brought and the two women placed upon it.

"After you, dear," said the mermaid significantly to the Amazonian queen; "you're the oldest."

"Thank you!" said the Amazonian queen, stepping back. "Fish is always served first."

Stung by the insult, with a wild scream of rage the mermaid grappled her in her arms and leaped into the sea.

As the waters closed over them for ever, the Pirate Prodigy sprang to his feet. "Up with the black flag, and bear away for New London," he shouted in trumpet-like tones. "Ha! ha! Once more the Rover is free!"

Indeed it was too true. In that fatal moment he had again loosed himself from the trammels of human feeling and was once more the Boy Avenger.

CHAPTER III.

AGAIN I must ask my young friends to mount my hippogriff and hie with me to the almost inaccessible heights of the Rocky Mountains. There, for years, a band of wild and untamable savages, known as the Pigeon Feet, had resisted the blankets and bibles of civilization. For years the trails leading to their camp were marked by the bones of teamsters and broken waggons, and the trees were decked with the dying scalp-locks of women and children. The boldest of military leaders hesitated to attack them in their fortresses, and prudently left the scalping-knives, rifles, powder, and shot provided by a paternal government for their welfare lying on the ground a few miles from their encampment, with the request that they were not to be used until the military had safely retired. Hitherto, save an occasional incursion into the territory of the

Knock-knees, a rival tribe, they had limited their depredations to the vicinity.

But lately a baleful change had come over them. Acting under some evil influence, they now pushed their warfare into the white settlements, carrying fire and destruction with them. Again and again had the Government offered them a free pass to Washington and the privilege of being photographed, but under the same evil guidance they refused. There was a singular mystery in their mode of aggression. Schoolhouses were always burned, the schoolmasters taken into captivity, and never again heard from. A palace car on the Union Pacific Railway, containing an excursion party of teachers *en route* to San Francisco, was surrounded, its inmates captured, and — their vacancies in the school catalogue never again filled. Even a board of educational examiners, proceeding to Cheyenne, were taken prisoners, and obliged to answer questions they themselves had proposed, amidst horrible tortures. By degrees these atrocities were traced to the malign influence of a new chief of the tribe. As yet little was known of him but through his

baleful appellations, "Young Man who Goes for His Teacher," and "He lifts the Hair of the School Marm." He was said to be small and exceedingly youthful in appearance. Indeed, his earlier appellative, "He Wipes His Nose on His Sleeve," was said to have been given to him to indicate his still boy-like habits.

It was night in the encampment and among the lodges of the Pigeon Toes. Dusky maidens flitted in and out among the camp-fires like brown moths, cooking the toothsome buffalo-hump, frying the fragrant bear's-meat, and stewing the esculent bean for the braves. For a few favoured ones sput grasshoppers were reserved as a rare delicacy, although the proud Spartan soul of their chief scorned all such luxuries.

He was seated alone in his wigwam, attended only by the gentle Mushymush, fairest of the Pigeon Feet maidens. Nowhere were the characteristics of her great tribe more plainly shown than in the little feet that lapped over each other in walking. A single glance at the chief was sufficient to show the truth of the wild rumours respecting his youth. He was

scarcely twelve, of proud and lofty bearing, and clad completely in wrappings of various-coloured scalloped cloths, which gave him the appearance of a somewhat extra-sized pen-wiper. An enormous eagle's feather, torn from the wing of a bald eagle who once attempted to carry him away, completed his attire. It was also the memento of one of his most superhuman feats of courage. He would undoubtedly have scalped the eagle but that nature had anticipated him.

"Why is the Great Chief sad?" said Mushy-mush softly. "Does his soul still yearn for the blood of the palefaced teachers? Did not the scalping of two professors of geology in the Yale exploring party satisfy his warrior's heart yesterday? Has he forgotten that Gardener and King are still to follow? Shall his own Mushy-mush bring him a botanist to-morrow? Speak, for the silence of my brother lies on my heart like the snow on the mountain and checks the flow of my speech."

Still the proud Boy Chief sat silent. Suddenly he said "Hist!" and rose to his feet. Taking a long rifle from the ground he adjusted

its sight. Exactly seven miles away on the slope of the mountain the figure of a man was seen walking. The Boy Chief raised the rifle to his unerring eye and fired. The man fell.

A scout was despatched to scalp and search the body. He presently returned.

"Who was the paleface?" eagerly asked the chief.

"A life insurance agent."

A dark scowl settled on the face of the chief.

"I thought it was a book pedlar."

"Why is my brother's heart sore against the book pedlar?" asked Mushymush.

"Because," said the Boy Chief fiercely, "I am again without my regular dime novel—and I thought he might have one in his pack. Hear me, Mushymush. The United States mails no longer bring me my *Young America* or my *Boys' and Girls' Weekly*. I find it impossible, even with my fastest scouts, to keep up with the rear of General Howard, and replenish my literature from the sutler's waggon. Without a dime novel or a *Young America*, how am I to keep up this Injin business?"

Mushymush remained in meditation a single moment. Then she looked up proudly.

"My brother has spoken. It is well. He shall have his dime novel. He shall know the kind of hair-pin his sister Mushymush is."

And she arose and gambolled lightly as the fawn out of his presence.

In two hours she returned. In one hand she held three small flaxen scalps, in the other 'The Boy Marauder,' complete in one volume, price ten cents.

"Three palefaced children," she gasped, "were reading it in the tail end of an emigrant waggon. I crept up to them softly. Their parents are still unaware of the accident," and she sank helpless at his feet.

"Noble girl!" said the Boy Chief, gazing proudly on her prostrate form; "and these are the people that a military despotism expects to subdue!"

CHAPTER IV.

BUT the capture of several waggon-loads of commissary whisky, and the destruction of two tons of stationery intended for the general commanding, which interfered with his regular correspondence with the War Department, at last awakened the United States military authorities to active exertion. A quantity of troops were massed before the Pigeon Feet encampment, and an attack was hourly imminent.

"Shine your boots, sir?"

It was the voice of a youth in humble attire, standing before the flap of the commanding general's tent.

The general raised his head from his correspondence.

"Ah," he said, looking down on the humble boy, "I see; I shall write that the appliances of civilisation move steadily forward with the army. Yes," he added, "you may shine my

military boots. You understand, however, that to get your pay you must first——"

"Make a requisition on the commissary-general, have it certified to by the quartermaster, countersigned by the post-adjutant, and submitted by you to the War Department——"

"And charged as stationery," added the general gently. "You are, I see, an intelligent and thoughtful boy. I trust you neither use whisky, tobacco, nor are ever profane?"

"I promised my sainted mother——"

"Enough! Go on with your blacking; I have to lead the attack on the Pigeon Feet at eight precisely. It is now half-past seven," said the general, consulting a large kitchen clock that stood in the corner of his tent.

The little bootblack looked up: the general was absorbed in his correspondence. The bootblack drew a tin putty-blower from his pocket, took unerring aim, and nailed in a single shot the minute-hand to the dial. Going on with his blacking, yet stopping ever and anon to glance over the general's plan of campaign, spread on the table before him, he was at last interrupted by the entrance of an officer.

"Everything is ready for the attack, general. It is now eight o'clock."

"Impossible! It is only half-past seven."

"But my watch, and the watches of the staff——"

"Are regulated by my kitchen clock, that has been in my family for years. Enough! it is only half-past seven."

The officer retired; the bootblack had finished one boot. Another officer appeared.

"Instead of attacking the enemy, general, we are attacked ourselves. Our pickets are already driven in."

"Military pickets should not differ from other pickets," said the bootblack modestly. "To stand firmly they should be well driven in."

"Ha! there is something in that," said the general thoughtfully. "But who are you, who speak thus?"

Rising to his full height, the bootblack threw off his outer rags, and revealed the figure of the Boy Chief of the Pigeon Feet.

"Treason!" shrieked the general; "order an advance along the whole line."

But in vain. The next moment he fell beneath the tomahawk of the Boy Chief, and within the next quarter of an hour the United States army was dispersed. Thus ended the battle of Bootblack Creek.

CHAPTER V.

AND yet the Boy Chief was not entirely happy. Indeed, at times he seriously thought of accepting the invitation extended by the Great Chief at Washington immediately after the massacre of his soldiers, and once more revisiting the haunts of civilisation. His soul sickened in feverish inactivity; schoolmasters palled on his taste; he had introduced base-ball, blind hooky, marbles, and peg-top among his Indian subjects, but only with indifferent success. The squaws persisted in boring holes through the china alleys and wearing them as necklaces; his warriors stuck pikes in their base-ball bats, and made war-clubs of them. He could not but feel, too, that the

gentle Mushymush, although devoted to her paleface brother, was deficient in culinary education. Her mince pies were abominable; her jam far inferior to that made by his Aunt Sally of Doemville. Only an unexpected incident kept him equally from the extreme of listless Sybaritic indulgence or of morbid cynicism. Indeed, at the age of twelve, he already had become disgusted with existence.

He had returned to his wigwam after an exhausting buffalo-hunt, in which he had slain two hundred and seventy-five buffalo with his own hand, not counting the individual buffalo on which he had leaped, so as to join the herd, and which he afterward led into the camp a captive and a present to the lovely Mushymush. He had scalped two express riders, and a correspondent of the *New York Herald;* had despoiled the Overland Mail Stage of a quantity of vouchers which enabled him to draw double rations from the Government, and was reclining on a bearskin smoking and thinking of the vanity of human endeavour, when a scout entered, saying that a paleface youth had demanded access to his person.

"Is he a commissioner? If so, say that the red man is rapidly passing to the happy hunting-grounds of his fathers, and now desires only peace, blankets, and ammunition; obtain the latter, and then scalp the commissioner."

"But it is only a youth who asks an interview."

"Does he look like an insurance agent? If so, say that I have already policies in three Hartford companies. Meanwhile prepare the stake, and see that the squaws are ready with their implements of torture."

The youth was admitted; he was evidently only half the age of the Boy Chief. As he entered the wigwam, and stood revealed to his host, they both started. In another moment they were locked in each other's arms.

"Jenky, old boy!"

"Bromley, old fel!"

B. F. Jenkins, for such was the name of the Boy Chief, was the first to recover his calmness. Turning to his warriors he said proudly:

"Let my children retire while I speak to the agent of our Great Father in Washington. Hereafter no latch-keys will be provided for the

wigwams of the warriors. The practice of late hours must be discouraged."

"How!" said the warriors, and instantly retired.

"Whisper!" said Jenkins, drawing his friend aside; "I am known here only as the Boy Chief of the Pigeon Toes."

"And I," said Bromley Chitterlings proudly, "am known everywhere as the Pirate Prodigy—the Boy Avenger of the Patagonian coast."

"But how came you here?"

"Listen! My pirate brig, the *Lively Mermaid*, now lies at Meiggs's wharf in San Francisco, disguised as a Mendicino lumber vessel. My pirate crew accompanied me here in a palace car from San Francisco."

"It must have been expensive," said the prudent Jenkins.

"It was, but they defrayed it by a collection from the other passengers—you understand. The papers will be full of it to-morrow. Do you take in the *New York Sun?*"

"No; I dislike their Indian policy. But why are you here?"

"Hear me, Jenk! 'Tis a long and a sad

story. The lovely Eliza J. Sniffen, who fled with me from Doemville, was seized by her parents and torn from my arms at New Rochelle. Reduced to poverty by the breaking of the savings bank of which he was president —a failure to which I largely contributed, and the profits of which I enjoyed—I have since ascertained that Eliza Jane Sniffen was forced to become a schoolmistress, departed to take charge of a seminary in Colorado, and since then has never been heard from."

Why did the Boy Chief turn pale, and clutch at the tent-pole for support? Why, indeed?

"Eliza Jane Sniffen," gasped Jenkins, "aged fourteen, red-haired, with a slight tendency to strabismus?"

"The same."

"Heaven help me! She died by my mandate!"

"Traitor!" shrieked Chitterlings, rushing at Jenkins with a drawn poniard.

But a figure interposed. The slight girlish form of Mushymush with outstretched hands stood between the exasperated Pirate Prodigy and the Boy Chief.

"Forbear," she said sternly to Chitterlings; "you know not what you do."

The two youths paused.

"Hear me," she said rapidly. "When captured in a confectioner's shop at New Rochelle, E. J. Sniffen was taken back to poverty. She resolved to become a schoolmistress. Hearing of an opening in the West, she proceeded to Colorado to take exclusive charge of the *pensionnat* of Mdme. Choflie, late of Paris. On the way thither she was captured by the emissaries of the Boy Chief——"

"In consummation of a fatal vow I made, never to spare educational instructors," interrupted Jenkins.

"But in her captivity," continued Mushymush, "she managed to stain her face with poke-berry juice, and mingling with the Indian maidens was enabled to pass for one of the tribe. Once undetected, she boldly ingratiated herself with the Boy Chief—how honestly and devotedly he best can tell—for I, Mushymush, the little sister of the Boy Chief, am Eliza Jane Sniffen."

The Pirate Prodigy clasped her in his arms. The Boy Chief, raising his hand, ejaculated—

"Bless you, my children!"

"There is but one thing wanting to complete this reunion," said Chitterlings, after a pause, but the hurried entrance of a scout stopped his utterance.

"A commissioner from the Great Father in Washington."

"Scalp him!" shrieked the Boy Chief; "this is no time for diplomatic trifling."

"We have, but he still insists upon seeing you, and has sent in his card."

The Boy Chief took it, and read aloud, in agonized accents:

"'Charles Francis Adams Golightly, late page in United States Senate, and acting commissioner of United States.'"

In another moment, Golightly, pale, bleeding, and, as it were, prematurely bald, but still cold and intellectual, entered the wigwam. They fell upon his neck and begged his forgiveness.

"Don't mention it," he said quietly; "these things must and will happen under our present system of government. My story is brief. Obtaining political influence through caucuses, I became at last page in the Senate. Through

the exertions of political friends, I was appointed clerk to the commissioner whose functions I now represent. Knowing through political spies in your own camp who you were, I acted upon the physical fears of the commissioner, who was an ex-clergyman, and easily induced him to deputise me to consult with you. In doing so, I have lost my scalp, but as the hirsute signs of juvenility have worked against my political progress I do not regret it. As a partially bald young man I shall have more power. The terms that I have to offer are simply this: you can do everything you want, go anywhere you choose, if you will only leave this place. I have a hundred-thousand-dollar draft on the United States Treasury in my pocket at your immediate disposal."

"But what's to become of me?" asked Chitterlings.

"Your case has already been under advertisement. The Secretary of State, who is an intelligent man, has determined to recognize you as *de jure* and *de facto* the only loyal representative of the Patagonian Government. You may safely proceed to Washington as its Envoy

Extraordinary. I dine with the Secretary next week."

"And yourself, old fellow?"

"I only wish that twenty years from now you will recognise by your influence and votes the rights of C. F. A. Golightly to the Presidency."

And here ends our story. Trusting that my dear young friends may take whatever example or moral their respective parents and guardians may deem fittest from these pages, I hope in future years to portray further the career of those three young heroes I have already introduced in the springtime of life to their charitable consideration.

"WHO WAS MY QUIET FRIEND?"

"WHO WAS MY QUIET FRIEND?"

"STRANGER!"

The voice was not loud, but clear and penetrating. I looked vainly up and down the narrow darkening trail. No one in the fringe of alder ahead; no one on the gullied slope behind.

"*O!* stranger!"

This time a little impatiently. The Californian vocative, "O," always meant business.

I looked up, and perceived for the first time, on the ledge, thirty feet above me, another trail parallel with my own, and looking down upon me through the buckeye bushes a small man on a black horse.

Five things to be here noted by the circumspect mountaineer. *First*, the locality—lonely and inaccessible and away from the regular far-

ing of teamsters and miners. *Secondly*, the stranger's superior knowledge of the road from the fact that the other trail was unknown to the ordinary traveller. *Thirdly*, that he was well armed and equipped. *Fourthly*, that he was better mounted. *Fifthly*, that any distrust or timidity arising from the contemplation of these facts had better be kept to oneself.

All this passed rapidly through my mind as I returned his salutation.

"Got any tobacco?" he asked.

I had, and signified the fact, holding up the pouch inquiringly.

"All right, I'll come down. Ride on, and I'll jine ye on the slide."

"The slide?" Here was a new geographical discovery as odd as the second trail. I had ridden over the trail a dozen times, and seen no communication between the ledge and trail. Nevertheless I went on a hundred yards or so, when there was a sharp crackling in the underbrush, a shower of stones on the trail, and my friend plunged through the bushes to my side down a grade that I should scarcely have dared to lead my horse. There was no doubt

he was an accomplished rider—another fact to be noted.

As he ranged beside me I found I was not mistaken as to his size; he was quite under the medium height, and, but for a pair of cold gray eyes, was rather commonplace in feature.

"You've got a good horse there," I suggested.

He was filling his pipe from my pouch, but looked up a little surprised, and said "Of course." He then puffed away with the nervous eagerness of a man long deprived of that sedative. Finally, between the puffs, he asked me whence I came.

I replied from "Lagrange."

He looked at me a few moments curiously, but on my adding that I had only halted there for a few hours, he said: "I thought I knew every man between Lagrange and Indian Spring, but somehow I sorter disremember your face and your name."

Not particularly caring that he should remember either, I replied, half laughingly, that as I lived the other side of Indian Spring, it was

quite natural. He took the rebuff—if such it was—so quietly, that as an act of mere perfunctory politeness, I asked him where he came from.

"Lagrange."

"And you are going to——"

"Well! that depends pretty much on how things pan out, and whether I can make the riffle." He let his hand rest quite unconsciously on the leathern holster of his dragoon revolver, yet with a strong suggestion to me of his ability "to make the riffle" if he wanted to, and added: "But just now I was reck'nin' on taking a little *pasear* with you."

There was nothing offensive in his speech, save its familiarity and the reflection, perhaps, that whether I objected or not, he was quite able to do as he said. I only replied that if our *pasear* was prolonged beyond Heavytree Hill, I should have to borrow his beast. To my surprise, he replied quietly, "That's so," adding that the horse was at my disposal when he wasn't using it, and *half* of it when he was. "Dick has carried double many a time before this," he continued, "and kin do it again; when

your mustang gives out, I'll give you a lift, and room to spare."

I could not help smiling at the idea of appearing before the boys at Red Gulch *en croupe* with the stranger; but neither could I help being oddly affected by the suggestion that his horse had done double duty before. "On what occasion, and why?" was a question I kept to myself. We were ascending the long rocky flank of the Divide; the narrowness of the trail obliged us to proceed slowly and in file, so that there was little chance for conversation, had he been disposed to satisfy my curiosity.

We toiled on in silence, the buckeye giving way to *chimisal*, the westering sun, reflected again from the blank walls beside us, blinding our eyes with its glare. The pines in the cañon below were olive gulfs of heat, over which a hawk here and there drifted lazily, or rising to our level, cast a weird and gigantic shadow of slowly moving wings on the mountain side. The superiority of the stranger's horse led him often far in advance, and made me hope that he might forget me entirely, or push on, grown

weary of waiting. But regularly he would halt by a boulder, or reappear from some *chimisal*, where he had patiently halted. I was beginning to hate him mildly, when at one of those reappearances, he drew up to my side, and asked me how I liked Dickens!

Had he asked my opinion of Huxley or Darwin, I could not have been more astonished. Thinking it were possible that he referred to some local celebrity of Lagrange, I said, hesitatingly:

"You mean——?"

"Charles Dickens. Of course you've read him! Which of his books do you like best?"

I replied with considerable embarrassment that I liked them all—as I certainly did.

He grasped my hand for a moment with a fervor quite unlike his usual phlegm, and said, "That's me, old man. Dickens ain't no slouch. You can count on him pretty much all the time."

With this rough preface, he launched into a criticism of the novelist, which for intelligent sympathy and hearty appreciation I had rarely

heard equalled. Not only did he dwell upon the exuberance of his humor, but upon the power of his pathos and the all-pervading element of his poetry. I looked at the man in astonishment. I had considered myself a rather diligent student of the great master of fiction, but the stranger's felicity of quotation and illustration staggered me. It is true that his thought was not always clothed in the best language, and often appeared in the slouching, slangy undress of the place and period, yet it never was rustic nor homespun, and sometimes struck me with its precision and fitness. Considerably softened toward him, I tried him with other literature. But vainly. Beyond a few of the lyrical and emotional poets, he knew nothing. Under the influence and enthusiasm of his own speech, he himself had softened considerably; offered to change horses with me, readjusted my saddle with professional skill, transferred my pack to his own horse, insisted upon my sharing the contents of his whiskey flask, and, noticing that I was unarmed, pressed upon me a silver mounted derringer, which he assured me he could "warrant." These various

offices of good will and the diversion of his talk beguiled me from noticing the fact that the trail was beginning to become obscure and unrecognizable. We were evidently pursuing a route unknown before to me. I pointed out the fact to my companion a little impatiently. He instantly resumed his old manner and dialect.

"Well, I reckon one trail's as good as another, and what hev ye got to say about it?"

I pointed out, with some dignity, that I preferred the old trail.

"Mebbee you did. But you're jiss now takin' a *pasear* with *me*. This yer trail will bring you right into Indian Spring, and *onnoticed*, and no questions asked. Don't you mind now, I'll see you through."

It was necessary here to make some stand against my strange companion. I said firmly, yet as politely as I could, that I had proposed stopping over night with a friend.

"Whar?"

I hesitated. The friend was an eccentric Eastern man, well known in the locality for his fastidiousness and his habits as a recluse. A

misanthrope of ample family and ample means, he had chosen a secluded but picturesque valley in the Sierras, where he could rail against the world without opposition. "Lone Valley," or "Boston Ranch" as it was more familiarly called, was the one spot that the average miner both respected and feared. Mr. Sylvester, its proprietor, had never affiliated with "the boys," nor had he ever lost their respect by any active opposition to their ideas. If seclusion had been his object he certainly was gratified. Nevertheless, in the darkening shadows of the night, and on a lonely and unknown trail, I hesitated a little at repeating his name to a stranger of whom I knew so little. But my mysterious companion took the matter out of my hands.

"Look yar," he said, suddenly, "thar ain't but one place 'twixt yer and Indian Spring whar ye can stop, and that's Sylvester's."

I assented, a little sullenly.

"Well," said the stranger, quietly, and with a slight suggestion of conferring a favor on me. "Ef you're pointed for Sylvester's—why—*I don't mind stopping thar with ye.* It's a little off

the road—I'll lose some time—but taking it by and large I don't much."

I stated, as rapidly and as strongly as I could, that my acquaintance with Mr. Sylvester did not justify the introduction of a stranger to his hospitality—that he was unlike most of the people here—in short, that he was a queer man, &c., &c.

To my surprise my companion answered quietly: "O, that's all right. I've heerd of him. Ef you don't feel like checking me through, or if you'd rather put 'C. O. D.' on my back, why it's all the same to me. I'll play it alone. Only you just count me in. Say 'Sylvester' all the time. That's me!"

What could I oppose to this man's quiet assurance? I felt myself growing red with anger and nervous with embarrassment? What would the correct Sylvester say to me? What would the girls—I was a young man then, and had won an *entrée* to their domestic circle by my reserve—known by a less complimentary adjective among the "boys"—what would they say to my new acquaintance? Yet I certainly could not object to his assuming all

risk on his own personal recognizances, nor could I resist a certain feeling of shame at my embarrassment.

We were beginning to descend. In the distance below us already twinkled the lights in the solitary rancho of Lone Valley. I turned to my companion. "But you have forgotten that I don't even know your name. What am I to call you?"

"Thet's so," he said, musingly. "Now, let's see. 'Kearney' would be a good name. It's short and easy like. Thar's a street in 'Frisco the same title. Kearney it is."

"But——" I began, impatiently.

"Now you leave all that to me," he interrupted, with a superb self-confidence that I could not but admire. "The name ain't no account. It's the man that's responsible. Ef I was to lay for a man that I reckoned was named Jones, and after I fetched him I found out on the inquest that his real name was Smith—that wouldn't make no matter, as long as I got the man."

The illustration, forcible as it was, did not strike me as offering a prepossessing introduc-

tion, but we were already at the rancho. The barking of dogs brought Sylvester to the door of the pretty little cottage which his taste had adorned.

I briefly introduced Mr. Kearney. "Kearney will do—Kearney's good enough for me," commented the *soi-disant* Kearney half aloud, to my own horror and Sylvester's evident mystification, and then he blandly excused himself for a moment that he might personally supervise the care of his own beast. When he was out of ear-shot, I drew the puzzled Sylvester aside.

"I have picked up—I mean I have been picked up on the road by a gentle maniac, whose name is not Kearney. He is well armed and quotes Dickens. With care, acquiescence in his views on all subjects, and general submission to his commands, he may be placated. Doubtless the spectacle of your helpless family, the contemplation of your daughter's beauty and innocence, may touch his fine sense of humor and pathos. Meanwhile, Heaven help you, and forgive me."

I ran up stairs to the little den that my

hospitable host had kept always reserved for me in my wanderings. I lingered some time over my ablutions, hearing the languid, gentlemanly drawl of Sylvester below mingled with the equally cool, easy slang of my mysterious acquaintance. When I came down to the sitting room I was surprised, however, to find the self-styled Kearney quietly seated on the sofa, the gentle May Sylvester, the "Lily of Lone Valley," sitting with maidenly awe and unaffected interest on one side of him, while on the other that arrant flirt, her cousin Kate, was practising the pitiless archery of her eyes, with an excitement that seemed almost real.

"Who is your deliciously cool friend?" she managed to whisper to me at supper as I sat utterly dazed and bewildered between the enrapt May Sylvester, who seemed to hang upon his words, and this giddy girl of the period, who was emptying the battery of her charms in active rivalry upon him. "Of course we know his name isn't Kearney. But how romantic! And isn't he perfectly lovely? And who is he?"

I replied with severe irony that I was not aware what foreign potentate was then travelling *incognito* in the Sierras of California, but that when his Royal Highness was pleased to inform me, I should be glad to introduce him properly. "Until then," I added, "I fear the acquaintance must be Morganatic."

"You're only jealous of him," she said pertly. "Look at May—she is completely fascinated. And her father too." And actually, the languid, world-sick, cynical Sylvester was regarding him with a boyish interest and enthusiasm almost incompatible with his nature. Yet I submit honestly to the clear-headed reason of my own sex, that I could see nothing more in the man than I have already delivered to the reader.

In the middle of an exciting story of adventure, of which he, to the already prejudiced mind of his fair auditors, was evidently the hero, he stopped suddenly.

"It's only some pack train passing the bridge on the lower trail," explained Sylvester. "Go on."

"It may be my horse is a trifle oneasy in the

stable," said the alleged Kearney; "he ain't used to boards and covering." Heaven only knows what wild and delicious revelation lay in the statement of this fact, but the girls looked at each other with cheeks pink with excitement as Kearney arose, and, with quiet absence of ceremony, quitted the table.

"Ain't he just lovely!" said Kate, gasping for breath, "and so witty."

"Witty!" said the gentle May, with just the slightest trace of defiance in her sweet voice. "Witty, my dear? why don't you see that his heart is just breaking with pathos? Witty, indeed; why, when he was speaking of that poor Mexican woman that was hung, I saw the tears gather in his eyes. Witty, indeed!"

"Tears," laughed the cynical Sylvester, "tears, idle tears. Why, you silly children, the man is a man of the world—a philosopher, quiet, observant, unassuming."

"Unassuming!" Was Sylvester intoxicated, or had the mysterious stranger mixed the "insane verb" with the family pottage? He returned before I could answer this self-asked

inquiry, and resumed coolly his broken narrative. Finding myself forgotten in the man I had so long hesitated to introduce to my friends, I retired to rest early, only to hear, through the thin partitions, two hours later, enthusiastic praises of the new guest from the voluble lips of the girls, as they chatted together in the next room before retiring.

At midnight I was startled by the sound of horses' hoofs and the jingling of spurs below. A conversation between my host and some mysterious personage in the darkness was carried on in such a low tone that I could not learn its import. As the cavalcade rode away, I raised the window.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Sylvester, coolly, "only another one of those playful homicidal freaks peculiar to the country. A man was shot by Cherokee Jack over at Lagrange this morning, and that was the Sheriff of Calaveras and his posse hunting him. I told him I'd seen nobody but you and your friend. By the way, I hope the cursed noise hasn't disturbed him. The poor fellow looked as if he wanted rest."

I thought so, too. Nevertheless, I went softly to his room. It was empty. My impression was that he had distanced the Sheriff of Calaveras about two hours.

THE END.

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